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## Local Health Guru's offer Fitness, Peace of Mind

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Excerpt:

YOGA:Michele Baker

The lights are low inside Baker's studio on Piety st., and as the students begin stretching for her class, she cautions them to take it easy since it is just after Mardi Gras.

As she guides them through a blend of flowing yoga poses, she walks around the room, gently pushing on a student's back to relax his or her muscles and stretch the pose just a little more.

Baker teaches at her studio on Piety st. and the The New Orleans Athletic Club. While she blends styles to keep her classes creative and interesting, she says she concentrates on the importance of proper breathing while building strength of body and mind.

"It is very self reflective", says Baker. "Our mind and body are a union and that large muscle, the mind, which sometimes works for us and sometimes against us, is indicated everywhere throughout the body. The yoga asanas, or exercises, help us free anything that we are holding onto."

Many yoga teachers concentrate on just the physical aspects of yoga, shying away from some of the more spiritual practices or internal yoga possibilities, but Baker says she regularly incorporates chanting and meditation in every class. It is not surprising that some of Baker's students are well known spiritual leaders like voodoo priestess Sallie Glassman.

"We do a long relaxation at the end of class, place oil on their third eye, use candles, incense, music, and love, " Baker says. "I can not imagine leaving these elements out."

Baker has studied yoga across the country, most recently with Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, the guru of Astanga Yoga, and she will be traveling to New York in April to finish her training in Jivamukti Yoga. Once she's certified, she'll be the first Jivamukti Yoga teacher in New Orleans.